



Dr. Willie David Gunn

March 26, 1926 - April 5, 2023

Dr. Willie David Gunn, 97, passed away peacefully the morning of April 5, 2023, at Wesley Woods of Newnan. He was born in LaGrange, Georgia, on March 26, 1926, to the late Joseph Putnam Gunn and Nora Staley Gunn. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife Martha Claire Meeks Gunn (Marty) as well as all five of his sisters and brothers-in-law.

Our community lost a man who never ceased giving to and caring for others. Willie Gunn led an exemplary life, serving our country in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Naval Reserve, teaching at Newnan High School, teaching at the University of West Georgia, and serving as the Dean and later as the President of East Georgia College.

Willie grew up as the Great Depression ended. Having a disabled father, Willie quickly learned the value of hard work and began working when he was 8 years old. He delivered papers and groceries, and worked in the mills in LaGrange as soon as he could, to help support his family.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, Willie knew he wanted to join the military. His parents refused to sign the papers when he turned 17, but he finally convinced them to let him go after he completed high school. As a teenager he joined the Navy and was assigned to LST 534 (Landing Ship Tank), which was on its way to Okinawa in 1945.

In the Battle of Okinawa, LST 534 was struck by a kamikaze. Willie's ship partially sank, and he and his fellow crew members fought a fire on the ship for over 24 hours. After the ship was raised, two typhoons hit near Okinawa, with the second one beaching his ship in October 1945. In the aftermath, Willie tried to help starving Okinawans by giving them food from the ship's galley, many times without permission. Willie returned to the states in 1946 but did not leave the Navy for long. In 1956, he joined the U.S. Naval Reserve, from which he retired in 1986 with a total of over 32 years of service.

When Willie came home, he attended Mercer University. On the first day of a Spanish class, he noticed a lovely young woman sitting in the front. He misbehaved, hoping she would turn around to see him. The professor promptly moved him to the front of the class, and by chance had him sit beside the young woman he admired. By the time he walked her home, he had his first date set with Martha Claire Meeks, whom he called Marty and married.

Willie received his degree in Biology, and Marty received her degree in English. After college they moved to Newnan where he taught Biology at Newnan High School, and Marty taught at Atkinson Elementary School until they had their three children. He taught at NHS for 17 years. During summers, he earned a Master of Arts degree from Peabody College. He then attended the University of Georgia, earning his Ph.D. in Botany.

In 1966, he began his career as an Assistant Professor at West Georgia College, now the University of West Georgia. He taught there for 7 years before moving to Swainsboro, Georgia. Along with the first president, Dr. George Walker, Dr. Willie Gunn helped build Emanuel County Junior College (later named East Georgia State College) from the ground up. When Dr. Walker retired 3 years later, Dr. Gunn became president and served the

college for 17 years. During this time, Marty taught elementary school in the local public school system.

In the years that followed his becoming president, Dr. Gunn was in numerous service organizations that benefitted his community, state, and country, including the Exchange Club, Agri-Business Council, Chamber of Commerce, 4-H, Sons of the American Revolution, Emanuel County Sportsmen's Club, Georgia Association of Colleges, the United States LST Association, and many more. He and Marty were long-time members of the First Baptist Church of Swainsboro.

Dr. Gunn received numerous honors during his professional career and during his military career. In 1986, he was awarded the United States Navy Meritorious Service Medal, in the name of the president, for outstanding meritorious service while serving in the U.S. Naval Reserve as a Command Senior Chief Petty officer. This is the highest award bestowed for Naval Reserve duty.

Dr. and Mrs. Gunn have three children-Dr. Joseph Gunn (Jo), Vivian Dunn (John), Timothy Gunn (Karen). They have 6 beloved grandchildren-John Michael Dunn (Anna), Elizabeth D. Luke (Mike), Allison G. Napier (Billy), Jennifer G. Littlejohn (Will), Maxwell Gunn (Madison), and Benjamin Gunn (Christa). They have 9 beloved great-grandchildren. Between both of their families Marty and Willie have numerous nieces and nephews.

When a parent passes, children are frequently fortunate to find out special and generous things a parent has done. Today, Willie Gunn's children learned that he helped two students at East Georgia College procure large enough scholarships to finish their education at two other schools. He never told them he did this, and they found out much later.

The family would like to thank everyone at Wesley Woods who helped care for our father, our grandfather, and our great-grandfather. We will never forget your

kindness to him. The residents at Wesley Woods were always there to talk and help whenever our father needed them.

We would also like to express our deep and sincere gratitude to the wonderful, kind, compassionate women who cared for our father on a daily basis. Frances Amey, Janice Sewell, Vell Fearby, Marquita Hines, Darrell Hayes, and Melvis Rivers, you helped our father every single day. You made sure he was comfortable and happy. He loved you and respected you. You do not know how much the family admires you all and appreciates the work that you do.

Our father left one final message to all his friends and relatives. His message to you all: "Adiós, and goodbye!"

If you so desire, in remembrance of Dr. Willie Gunn's life, the family asks that any charitable donations be made to: East Georgia State College Foundation
Dr. Willie Gunn Scholarship Fund 131 College Circle
Swainsboro, GA 30401

The family will receive friends Wednesday, April 12th, from 6:00-8:00 PM at McKoon Funeral Home, 38 Jackson Street, Newnan. His service will be held in Swainsboro, GA at the end of April with the specific time and place announced at a later date.

Condolences may be expressed online at www.mckoon.com

McKoon Funeral Home and Crematory 770-253-4580

Cemetery Details

Swainsboro Cemetery

Swainsboro, GA 30401

Previous Events

Visitation

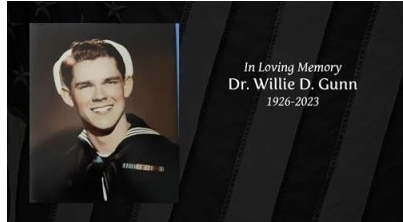
APR 12. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

McKoon Funeral Home
38 Jackson Street
Newnan, GA 30263

Tribute Wall



“ *McKoon Funeral Home & Crematory created a Tribute Video in memory of Dr. Willie David Gunn*



McKoon Funeral Home & Crematory - April 19, 2023 at 10:12 AM

CQ

“ *Willie was a member of the Biology faculty at West Georgia College (now the University of West Georgia) when I joined that faculty as a new first year Assistant Professor in 1972. I considered him as a mentor as he helped guide we through that first year. I remember him as a kind and caring friend. I survived that first year and 39 more before my retirement.*

*Carl Quertermus, Ph.D .
Professor Emeritus of Biology*

Carl Quertermus - April 16, 2023 at 10:38 PM

GB

“ *Dr. Gunn was one of the best teachers I ever had. From long ago I remember his dedication to education and his kindness to me. My the Lord be with him and with his family.*

Gary Brown - April 11, 2023 at 11:48 AM

DS

“ The Willie Gunn Family, Mr. Gunn was my biology teacher. I my self was in the Naval Reserve along with Sam Power and Bobby Lassetter. We're class mates taught by Mr. Gunn. Mr. Gunn would ride with us once a month to the reserve meetings for a whole week end. The first time we were leaving Newnan he told us, “ when we are in Newnan, you call me Mr. Gunn but when we are out of the City, call me Willie”. He was a super nice person.
May God bless your Family.
Don J. Jones Sr.

Don j. Jones Sr. - April 09, 2023 at 05:22 PM

PB

“ I had Mr. Gunn for chemistry & biology. He was one of a kind i'll never forget him.

pat bernhard - April 09, 2023 at 04:20 PM

MD

“ Dr. Gunn was my biology teacher at Newnan High School, class of 1955. A wonderful teacher. The only person ever who convinced me to handle a live snake (non-poisonous).
Marian Hammett Dudash

Marian Hammett Dudash - April 08, 2023 at 07:52 PM

GR

Missing a wonderful friend

Gene Ragsdale - April 08, 2023 at 08:03 PM

JC

“ The best teacher I had at Newnan High School.
John Coshnitzke

John Coshnitzke - April 08, 2023 at 06:06 PM

AC

“ *Uncle Willie was always so mischievous and fun; he and Aunt Marty would come visit my grandmother, his sister Jo-Jo, and always made time to visit with us as children. He drew silly faces on thumbs and toes, and shared stories of when he and my Grandmama were young. I remember him for how kind and fun he was, and for being so generous with his time and knowledge.*

Amy (Lee) Craig - April 08, 2023 at 03:50 PM



“ *Heavenly Heights Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Willie David Gunn.*



April 08, 2023 at 03:14 PM

TB

“ *Dr. Gunn was the inspiration for me to pursue biology and education as a career. He was the example I tried to follow. I am so grateful for his guidance and encouragement. He was truly one of a kind and I often think of him. He made an impact in so many people's lives beyond what he may have realized. Thank you Dr. Gunn.*
Tom Baird, NHS Class of '63

Tom Baird - April 08, 2023 at 03:00 PM

SC

“ During my membership in the Swainsboro Exchange Club, It was my great pleasure to sit beside Dr. Gunn at our weekly luncheons. He would grab my hand each week in a hearty handshake with a huge smile and it never failed to brighten my day. He was truly one of the great ones whose life, spirit and contributions to his friends, family and community will be missed.

scott cochran - April 08, 2023 at 01:04 PM

NK

“ Oh no, a flat tire, who's there to help? Dr. Gunn. When I first moved to Swainsboro, and Mary and I had a flat tire that I couldn't fix, it was the president of the college, where I'd just been hired, who came out to assist me. Need to build an art department, from the ground up? Who can you depend on to support your vision? Dr. Gunn. Feel you've experience an injustice? Who stands by your side, giving support and aid? Dr. Gunn!

I cannot imagine a better captain of the Emanuel County Junior College ship (that would eventually become East Georgia State College). Being an artist, with a hint of an anti-establishment spirit, Dr. Gunn's insistence on the faculty joining civic clubs rubbed me wrong way, but I eventually realized the wisdom of his wishes. It certainly resulted in the college's acceptance in the community. Luckily, the newly formed Emanuel Arts Council became the vehicle for my community outreach.

Dr. Gunn was a multifaceted personality. He didn't mind, even enjoyed, getting his hands dirty; he was distinguished and effective leader, building a strong and respected program; he was confident, with an open mind and heart; and above all, I considered him a friend. He will be missed!

Neil Kalmanson - April 08, 2023 at 12:20 PM

DC

“ Condolences to Vivian, John and the family. Willie was a neat guy and I have only pleasant and warm memories. Adios to you, too, Willie.
Dan Coleman



Dan Coleman - April 08, 2023 at 08:17 AM



“ Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Dr. Willie David Gunn.



April 07, 2023 at 03:48 PM

JW

“ Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, I'm so sorry for the loss of your dad. I've always heard amazing things about him from my mom! Thinking of you all.

Jennifer Welch - April 07, 2023 at 02:33 PM

GW

“ Please accept my sincere condolences on Willie's passing. I have known him since as met him when I came to teach at Newnan High in September 1962. He was a person with the highest standards and who commanded respect. I, as a 21 year old new teacher, lived in a little fear of him as he was in charge of audio-visual equipment and I was always fearful that I might break something and would have to face him. He is among the finest of men and will truly be missed.



Geraldine Welch - April 07, 2023 at 01:52 PM

JB

“ Willie and Marty were the greatest neighbors! I lived next door to them in Swainsboro. They became best friends the minute we moved in. They watched our dogs and our house when we were out of town. We spent many times sitting in their den just visiting. They will always hold a special place in my heart.
Jeanie Cadle Bradshaw

Jeanie Bradshaw - April 07, 2023 at 11:55 AM

RA

Dr. Gunn was one of the best people I have ever known. He garnered love and respect by being loving and respectful. He always asked me to call him "Willie", but I could never actually grasp calling him that without feeling that I was being mildly disrespectful by dropping the "Doctor".

If everyone had a heavy dose of Dr. Gunn in them, our country/this world would be a lot happier ... and MORE PRODUCTIVE.

ROBERT L AGRESS - April 08, 2023 at 12:52 PM

BL

Dr. Gunn let me nap on a lab table after I had worked the night shift at Bonnell. I have wondered if he had to explain to any students that I was not a cadaver. It's a great memory of a great man.

Bill Long - May 05, 2023 at 11:11 AM